Changes in the Social and Economic Status of Women by Metro-Nonmetro Residence

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Introduction

This report originated from a request to review the Draft Platform for Action for the Fourth U.N. World Conference on Women. The Platform is based on an assessment of what has been accomplished in the social, economic, and political status of women in the past 10 years and where the most difficult obstacles to women's progress remain. Critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action include the persistent and growing burden of poverty among women, inequality in access to education, health, and related services, and inequality in access to and participation in defining economic structures and policies. In September 1995, women from around the world gathered in Beijing to confer and adopt a program that would remove barriers to improving women's lives and increasing their opportunities to participate economically, socially, and politically in their communities and countries. The conference participants adopted a 12-point Platform for Action, to which the United States is a signatory. The review and appraisal conducted for the U.N. Conference highlighted significant advancement toward gender equality in the United States.

Accordingly, this report reviews and appraises the advancement of American women during the 1980's and mid-1990's, as reflected in the smaller earnings gap with men. This economic progress was largely limited to women in the late baby boom cohorts[1]—born 1956-65 and at ages 25-34 in 1990. Although an earnings gap still persists between women and men, women have narrowed the gap. The basic theme is one of progress for women relative to men since the 1980's. A subtheme concerns the women "left behind"—young women who are poor, single mothers, or high school dropouts. As nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) women have not consistently improved their standing relative to men when compared with women in metropolitan (metro) areas, this report examines trends by place of residence. The review of the U.S. experience during the 1980's and mid-1990's is used to assess what has been accomplished in the recent past and where the most difficult obstacles to women's progress remain.

Data

The data in this report are from the Public Use Micro Data files (PUMS) for the 1980 and 1990 decennial censuses. The March 1994 Current Population Survey (CPS) public use data file provides sociodemographic data for 1994 and economic data for 1993. The March 1994 CPS supplement is the latest survey data available with metro-nonmetro breakdowns. The estimates of employment and earnings from the Census of Population and the March 1994 Current Population Survey are comparable. Data on degrees earned are from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 1994*. Additional data from printed reports are cited where appropriate.

Changes in the data between 1980 and 1990 can be viewed as straightforward measures of secular trends. Ten years is long enough to measure trends fairly clearly, and both years were at the same stage of the business cycle, the end of long expansions. Changes over the 1990-94 period have potential complications; the period is short, and it ends in a year in which the recovery from the 1990-91 recession was not yet complete. Hence, some of the economic changes for the 1990-94 period may reflect transitory business cycle effects.

[1]A cohort is a group of individuals who have a unique set of experiences throughout life; the term is most commonly used to refer to all individuals born in a specified time period.

Social Changes

Marriage and Childbearing

Since the late 1970's and 1980's, women have been delaying marriage and childbearing and continuing their schooling. Having children later in life and having fewer children allow women the opportunity to pursue employment opportunities outside the home and to develop strong ties to the labor market. Furthermore, it has become increasingly acceptable, even expected, for mothers to be breadwinners as well as caregivers. Both lower childbearing rates and the wider availability of child care have contributed to increased female labor force participation in both metro and nonmetro areas.

The number of currently married women has declined since 1980, due to both an increase in delayed marriage among young adults and a greater tendency for marital dissolution. The decline has contributed to increased labor force activity by women. The decline in the percentage of currently married women age 25-44 between 1980 and 1994 was larger in nonmetro areas (10 percentage points compared with 8 percent in metro areas), though nonmetro women were still more likely to be married than their metro counterparts (table 1). This decline, especially among young adults who have delayed marriage, provides a significant source of growth in female labor force participation. In 1994, 12 percent of nonmetro women age 25-44 had never married, an increase from 7 percent in 1980. Among comparable metro women, 21 percent had never married in 1994, up from 13 percent in 1980.

Like marriage patterns, childbearing patterns have also changed. Across the Nation, the tendency to delay childbearing is evident in the increasing proportions of childless women age 25 and older between 1980 and the mid-1990's. The median age at first birth increased from 23.0 years in 1980 to 23.8 years in 1990 and 1993, the latest year available. Nonmetro women in 1994 were less likely to be childless (an indicator of delayed childbearing) than their metro counterparts, who had somewhat larger increases in the proportion childless since 1980. Nearly 22 percent of metro women age 25-34 were childless in 1980, climbing to 24 percent in the mid-1990's; 8 percent of metro

Table 1—Marriage and childbearing by age and residence, 1980, 1990, and 1994

Item	1980		1990		1994	
	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro
			Percent			
Ever married, age 25 and older:						
Women	91.2	94.6	87.9	93.3	86.9	92.5
Men	88.5	91.9	83.9	89.6	80.8	87.7
Currently married:						
Age 25-44—						
Women	70.2	80.5	63.9	73.8	62.4	70.5
Men	70.6	79.4	62.2	71.2	58.5	66.8
Age 45-64—						
Women	71.2	76.5	67.5	74.8	66.7	73.8
Men	83.6	86.5	79.3	82.7	76.9	80.8
Age 65 and older—						
Women	37.4	41.2	40.1	42.9	40.9	44.0
Men	76.6	78.6	76.9	78.3	75.4	78.6
Childless women:[1]						
Age 25-34	21.6	14.7	24.0	16.2	24.2	14.8
Age 35-44	7.9	6.1	12.5	8.6	13.5	9.8

[1]For ever-married women.

Source: Marriage data from 1980 and 1990 Census Public Use Micro Data file (PUMS) and 1994 March Current Population Survey (CPS) data file. Childbearing data from unpublished tabulations from June 1980 CPS, and published tabulations from *Current Population Reports*, P-20, No. 454 (June 1990) and P-20, No. 482 (June 1994).

women age 35 to 44 were childless in 1980, increasing to nearly 14 percent in 1994 (table 1). Among nonmetro women, only those 35-44 years old showed an increase in the percentage childless, climbing from 6 percent in 1980 to 10 percent in 1994 (table 1).

Education

Schooling strongly influences how much women earn and how likely they are to participate in the labor force. Thus, a narrowing of gender differences in educational attainment has contributed to closing the earnings gap. Women in all residential areas improved their educational standing between the 1980's and the mid-1990's, although women in nonmetro areas remained less educated than their metro counterparts. In 1994, 76 percent of nonmetro women 25 years and older had completed at least 4 years of high school, increasing from 60 percent in 1980 (table 2). This figure compares with 82 percent of metro women in 1994, up 13 percentage

Table 2—Educational attainment by age and residence, 1980, 1990, and 1994

Item	1980		1990		1994	
	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro
			Percent			
High school graduate or higher:						
Total, age 25 and older—						
Women	69.0	60.1	78.1	70.7	82.0	76.2
Men	70.8	59.3	79.3	69.6	82.7	75.0
Ratio women/men (x100)	97	101	98	102	99	102
Age 25-44—						
Women	83.5	77.3	88.3	84.1	88.7	86.1
Men	84.3	77.1	87.0	81.7	87.2	84.9
Ratio women/men (x100)	99	100	101	103	102	101
Age 45-64—						
Women	65.3	55.7	76.5	69.1	82.5	76.8
Men	64.9	52.3	77.0	66.8	82.9	75.0
Ratio women/men (x100)	101	107	99	103	100	102
Age 65 and older—						
Women	42.0	35.9	56.5	48.7	64.0	57.5
Men	41.2	29.8	57.7	45.4	66.2	51.4
Ratio women/men (x100)	102	120	98	107	97	112
College graduate or higher:						
Total, age 25 and older—						
Women	13.9	9.5	19.5	12.0	21.6	12.3
Men	22.5	13.2	26.4	14.6	27.9	15.1
Ratio women/men (x100)	62	72	74	82	77	81
Age 25-44—						
Women	19.7	13.1	25.9	15.8	26.4	15.6
Men	28.5	17.8	29.5	16.5	28.6	16.3
Ratio women/men (x100)	69	74	88	96	92	96
Age 45-64—						
Women	10.0	7.0	16.4	10.0	21.1	11.6
Men	19.1	10.6	26.4	15.0	30.9	16.5
Ratio women/men (x100)	52	66	62	67	68	70
Age 65 and older—						
Women	7.3	6.9	8.8	7.6	10.3	7.2
Men	11.5	6.9	16.0	9.4	19.2	9.8
Ratio women/men (x100)	63	100	55	81	54	73

Source: 1980 and 1990 Census Public Use Micro Data file (PUMS) and 1994 March Current Population Survey (CPS) data file.

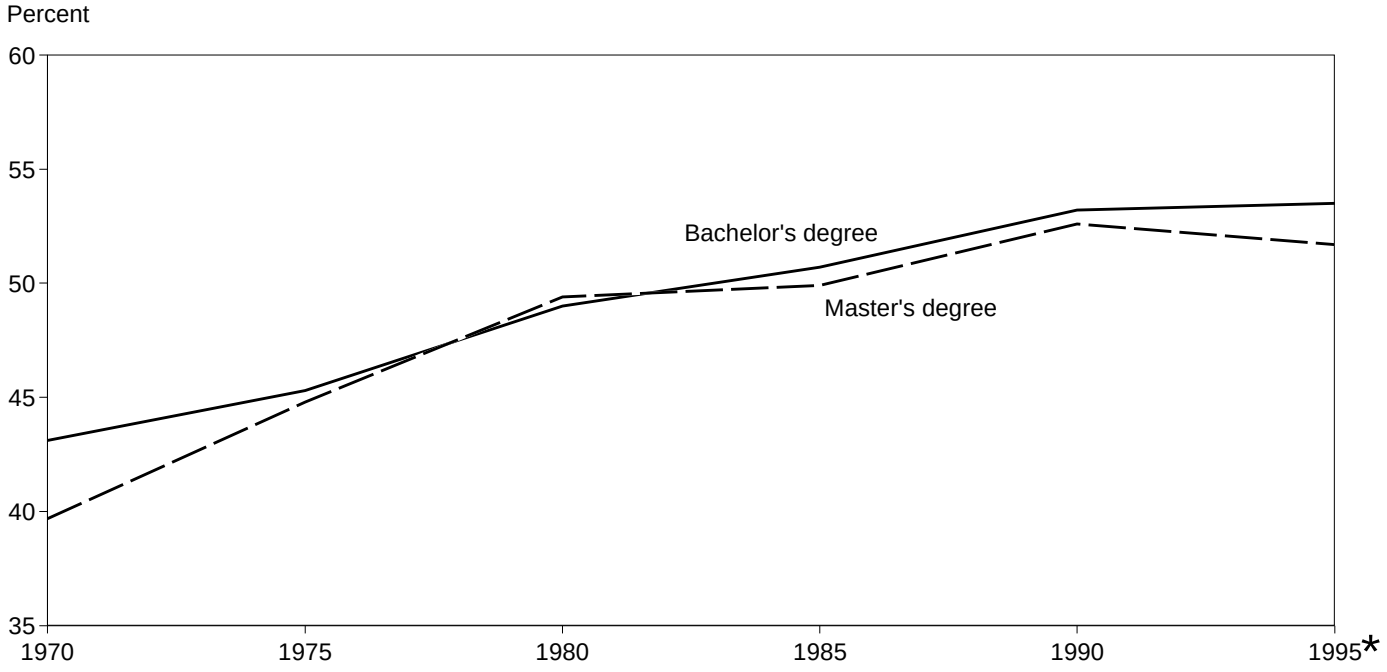
points from 1980, and 75 percent of nonmetro men, up from 59 percent in 1980. In nonmetro areas, comparable percentages of women and men had completed high school, but the lower educational attainment of the nonmetro population still limits the occupational choices of nonmetro women compared with metro women.

In contrast, nonmetro women are less likely than nonmetro males and their female counterparts in metro areas to have obtained a college degree. Nearly 10 percent of nonmetro women age 25 and older had completed a college degree or further schooling in 1980, increasing to 12 percent by 1994 (table 2). In 1980, 13 percent of nonmetro men had completed 4 or more years of college, increasing to 15 percent in 1994. Metro women achieving a college education or higher increased from 14 percent in 1980 to nearly 22 percent in 1994. The ratios of women's educational attainment relative to men's show that although more women attained college degrees over the decade, fewer women than men still earn college degrees. Some of the metro-nonmetro gap in higher education is due to the fact that nonmetro youths who pursue higher education are also quite likely to move to metro areas, where more of the universities and high-powered jobs are located (Gibbs and Cromartie).

Recent educational advances are reflected in the younger cohorts of women. Since 1980, college enrollment rates for all women and men were virtually identical (Bianchi). Among 25- to 44-year-olds, an equal share of men and women graduated from high school in 1994. The number of college graduates in the 25-44 age group increased among women but not among men. The percentage of women earning bachelor's and master's degrees increased steadily between 1970 and the early 1990's, with a slight decline in the mid-1990's (fig. 1). In 1980, 74 nonmetro women 25-44 years old had at least a college degree for every 100 men, but by 1994, women were nearly equal to men in college attainment—96 female college graduates for every 100 male college graduates (table 2). A similar pattern is found among metro women 25-44 years old, who improved their educational standing relative to men between 1980 and the mid-1990's. By 1994, 92 metro women had at least a college degree for every 100 men.

The number of women earning law, medical, and dental school degrees increased dramatically between 1970 and 1992 (fig. 2). Women earned 5 percent of law degrees in 1970 compared with 43 percent in

Figure 1
Percentage of bachelor's and master's degrees earned by women, 1970-95



*Projected.
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 1994*, NCES 94-115.

1992. Medical and dental degrees follow a similar trend. In 1970, women earned 8 percent of medical degrees, climbing to 36 percent in 1992. Women in the 1970's and 1980's were increasingly moving into traditionally male-dominated careers. Women earning doctorates in engineering, while still a low percentage, more than doubled, from nearly 4 percent in 1980 to 9 percent in 1992. Trends in higher educational attainment portend a continued opening of occupational opportunities for women.

Economic Changes

Labor Force Participation

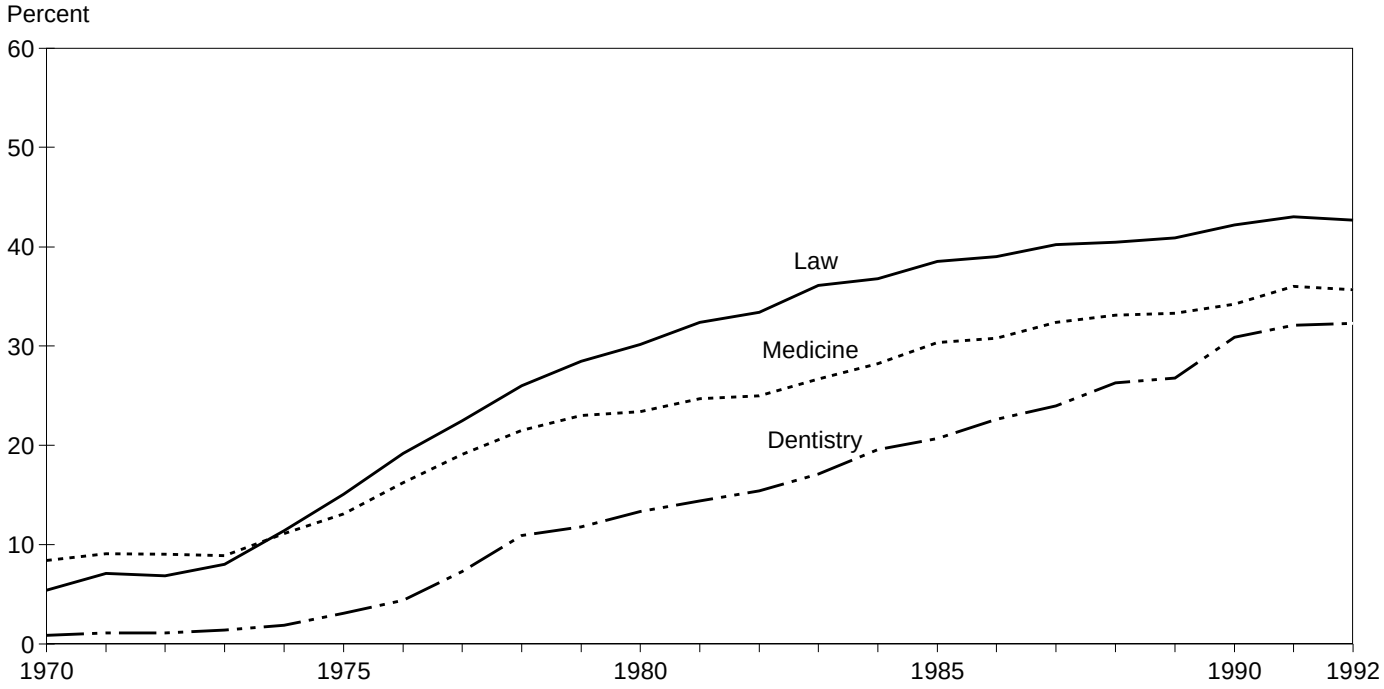
Although women are still less likely than men to be employed, labor force attachment[2] is more similar among recent cohorts of women and men than in earlier cohorts. This narrowing of gender differences has contributed to closing the earnings gap. This economic progress occurred largely among women in the late baby boom cohorts—born 1956-65 and at ages 25-34 in 1990. This cohort of women has educational and labor force careers quite similar to those of men their age, and their earnings are more equal to those of men.

As noted above, the rising educational attainment of women has favored their greater labor force participation in the last two decades. During the 1980's, the increasing number of women entering the labor force accounted for almost all nonmetro labor force growth (Parker). However, nonmetro women were less likely to be in the labor force than metro women. In 1994, 55 percent of nonmetro women and 59 percent of metro women age 25 and older were in the labor force, representing an increase of about 10 percentage points from 1980 for women in both residential areas (table 3). Age structure may be affecting the total labor force participation of women, as women age 25-44 had nearly identical labor force participation rates by residence.

Since 1970, the rates of female labor force participation have continued to increase, with almost half of the increase associated with ongoing patterns of demographic change—recent fertility declines, shifts in patterns of marriage and divorce, and educational upgrading (Lichter and Costanzo). The increase in the labor

[2]Labor force attachment refers to participation in the labor force, continuous work experience, and remaining in the labor market as one ages.

Figure 2
Percentage of women receiving degrees in dentistry, medicine, and law, 1970-92



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 1994*, NCES 94-115.

Table 3—Labor force participation and work experience by age and residence, 1980, 1990, and 1994

Item	1980		1990		1994	
	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro
	Percent					
In labor force:						
Total, age 25 and older—						
Women	49.8	43.9	57.8	51.4	58.9	54.8
Men	79.2	73.8	78.0	72.3	76.6	71.1
Age 25-44—						
Women	66.1	61.8	76.7	73.8	75.3	75.6
Men	94.9	94.4	94.1	93.2	92.3	90.9
Age 45-64—						
Women	51.7	46.5	61.0	54.9	64.7	61.7
Men	83.1	77.7	81.6	76.3	79.4	75.7
Age 65 and older—						
Women	8.9	8.4	9.3	7.7	9.1	8.7
Men	20.3	19.3	18.6	17.1	16.5	16.4
Full-time, year-round workers:[1]						
Total, age 25 and older—						
Women	47.9	42.7	53.1	47.3	59.6	54.4
Men	73.2	69.7	72.5	68.8	76.1	72.8
Ratio women/men (x100)	65	61	73	69	78	75
Age 25-44—						
Women	47.3	42.1	54.9	49.0	60.3	56.6
Men	74.3	72.8	75.0	72.9	77.4	75.4
Ratio women/men (x100)	64	58	73	67	78	75
Age 45-64—						
Women	51.7	47.4	54.0	49.4	62.6	55.7
Men	76.8	72.7	74.9	70.7	78.7	75.4
Ratio women/men (x100)	67	65	72	70	80	74
Age 65 and older—						
Women	25.5	20.9	23.0	19.2	24.9	18.8
Men	34.4	29.2	31.3	27.8	36.3	31.2
Ratio women/men (x100)	74	72	73	69	69	60

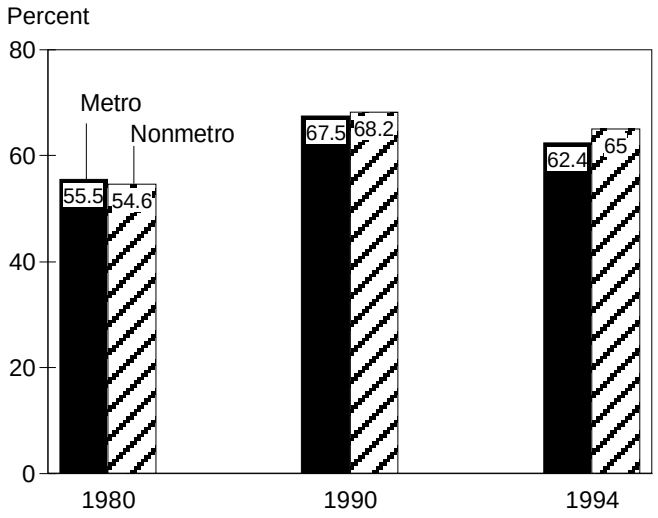
[1]Percentage refers to previous year—for example, 1980 column refers to 1979.
Source: 1980 and 1990 Census Public Use Micro Data file (PUMS) and 1994 March Current Population Survey (CPS) data file.

force participation rate for women age 25-44 began slowing in the late 1980's, and the rise in participation rates has flattened since 1990. The rates of women age 45-54 continued to rise through the early 1990's, whereas those for women age 55 and older remained flat (Hayghe).

Female labor force participation rates have generally been highest for young women without children, lowest for women with young children, and in between for women with older children. Women with young children, however, increased their labor force participation during the 1980's (Parker). In 1990, about 68 percent of all women with children under 18 years were in the labor force, an increase of 13 percentage points from 1980, with slightly lower rates in 1994 (fig. 3). The younger the children, the less likely the mother was to work all year, full time (Hayghe and Bianchi). Among women with children under 6 years old, about 59 percent of metro women and 61 percent of nonmetro women were in the labor force in the early 1990's, up 14 percent since 1980 (fig. 4). Culturally, it has

Figure 3

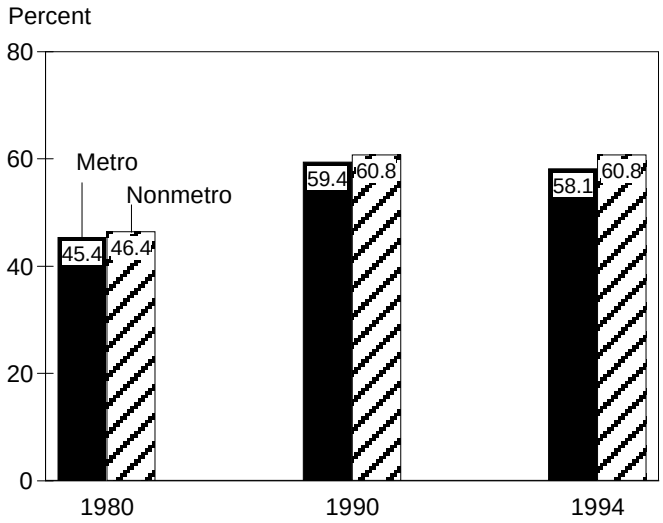
Labor force participation rates for women with children under 18 years old by residence, 1980, 1990, and 1994



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, *Rural Conditions and Trends,*Vol. 4, No. 3, Fall 1993--1980 and 1990 data. 1994 March Current Population Survey (CPS) data file.

Figure 4

Labor force participation rates for women with children under 6 years old by residence, 1980, 1990, and 1994



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, *Rural Conditions and Trends,*Vol. 4, No. 3, Fall 1993--1980 and 1990 data. 1994 March Current Population Survey (CPS) data file.

become increasingly acceptable, even expected, for mothers to be breadwinners as well as caregivers.

In addition to changes in family formation and increases in women's educational attainment, other factors have favored greater labor force participation of women in the last two decades. The rising rewards of employment rather than increasing economic need best explain the increases in married women's employment (England and Browne). Other research cites the declining earnings of men, particularly those without college degrees, as another factor in married women's increased employment (Bianchi). This factor may have had a greater effect in nonmetro areas, where a larger share of blue-collar workers have been hit harder by stagnant wages and even layoffs.

Additionally, cultural influences such as the women's movement and the social climate, and changing norms that legitimize women's employment, have helped foster the trend toward increased participation of women in the labor force. The civil rights and women's movements of the 1960's and 1970's successfully argued that personal and family choices of workers were not legitimate criteria to use in hiring and promotion decisions. This right to equal employment is protected by law, Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and reinforced by far-reaching court cases involving many of the largest employers in the United States. Due in part to the universality of these laws, metro-nonmetro differences in women's labor force participation are minimal. Although nonmetro persons tend to hold more traditional values, declining wages and the prevalence of service occupations in nonmetro areas tend to encourage the employment of women in these areas.

Work Experience

Labor force participation tells only part of the story of gender equality. The increased labor force attachment among young women in the baby boom cohort, and a lack of change in labor force patterns among men, produced a profound shift toward gender equality in lifetime work experience. A narrowing of differences in the lifetime work experience of men and women portends a subsequent narrowing of the gender gap in earnings.

Although job tenure has increased over time for women (Swinnerton and Wial), women are still much more likely than men to have had times during their adult life when they did not work for pay. Women also tend to have worked less time on their current job than

men; in 1984, 45 percent of women age 21-64 had worked 5 or more years at their current jobs compared with 55 percent of men (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1987).

Women's labor force attachment and job tenure have continued to increase in recent years. The decennial census and CPS do not collect employment histories; however, the percentage of women employed full-time, year-round serves as a good indicator of the strength of attachment of those moving into and out of the labor force in the 1980's and 1990's. The percentage of full-time, year-round workers also provides a view of the increase in work experience of young women and the growing similarity in men's and women's labor force attachment. The continuity of women's labor force attachment over the life course has increased greatly among the baby boom cohorts.

The percentage of women age 25-64 who are full-time, year-round workers increased in the 1980's and 1990's (table 3). Nearly 57 percent of nonmetro women age 25-44 were full-time, year-round workers in 1993, up from 42 percent in 1979. Metro women made comparable gains in work experience. In 1979, 58 nonmetro women age 25-44 were in the full-time work force for every 100 men, climbing to 75 per 100 in 1993. Today's women, including married mothers, are not only more likely to work, but they are also far more likely to do so on a year-round, full-time basis than their predecessors of 20 years ago (Hayghe and Bianchi).

Women age 25-64, regardless of educational level, made consistent gains in employment in the 1980's relative to men (table 4). Among women age 25-44, the employment rates of nonmetro high school graduates were 64 percent of men's in 1980, climbing to 83 percent in 1994. The gains by college graduates were even more dramatic, with the employment rate of nonmetro women age 25-44 increasing from 79 percent of that of nonmetro men in 1980 to 93 percent in 1994. The employment pattern for metro women was similar. The gains in employment for women 45-64 years old relative to men were comparable between 1980 and the mid-1990's for both high school and college-educated women.

Measures of cumulative lifetime work experience suggest that the proportion of women with continuous labor force attachment increased during the 1970's and 1980's for the baby boom generation of women

Table 4—Employment by educational attainment, age, and residence, 1980, 1990, and 1994

Item	1980		1990		1994	
	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro
			Percent			
High school graduates employed:						
Age 25-44—						
Women	61.0	57.6	69.1	68.1	68.1	72.2
Men	89.6	90.2	87.7	88.8	83.4	86.7
Ratio women/men (x100)	68	64	79	77	82	83
Age 45-64—						
Women	52.1	48.7	57.5	54.1	60.1	62.2
Men	81.8	80.4	77.9	77.0	73.2	75.5
Ratio women/men (x100)	64	61	74	70	82	82
College graduate or higher employed:						
Age 25-44—						
Women	74.1	74.9	82.6	83.9	81.4	86.5
Men	95.0	95.3	95.0	95.3	93.3	92.6
Ratio women/men (x100)	78	79	87	88	87	93
Age 45-64—						
Women	63.4	62.4	74.2	71.4	76.1	77.0
Men	90.8	87.2	88.2	85.0	86.3	84.5
Ratio women/men (x100)	70	72	84	84	88	91

Source: 1980 and 1990 Census Public Use Micro Data file (PUMS) and 1994 March Current Population Survey (CPS) data file.

(Bianchi; O'Neill and Polacheck). Women are working more continuously throughout their adult years partly due to increases in schooling, delayed childbearing and smaller families, and changes in marriage patterns. Lifetime work experience has increased among women of all educational and family statuses, suggesting a behavioral shift among recent cohorts of women. As there is currently little difference between metro and nonmetro areas with respect to the propensity of women to work, one would also expect to find the continuous labor force attachment of women to be similar by residence.

Occupation

Women and men differ in what they do in the labor market, which partly explains why women earn less than men do. Women now work in a broader range of industries and occupations but are still concentrated in certain occupations, such as clerical and service jobs, which are at the low end of the pay scale.

Women have made considerable progress since 1980. They now account for a majority of professionals and administrative support and service workers. In 1980, 41 percent of jobs in managerial and professional specialty occupations in nonmetro areas were held by women compared with 38 percent in metro areas. By 1990, women's share of managerial-professional positions had increased to 50 percent in nonmetro areas and 47 percent in metro areas (table 5). Between 1970 and 1990, women greatly increased their representation in white collar occupations (Bianchi). The per-

Table 5—Share of women in major occupational groups by age and residence, 1980, 1990, and 1994

Item	1980		1990		1994	
	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro
			Percent			
Managerial, professional, and specialty occupations:						
Total, age 25 and older	38.3	41.0	47.3	50.6	47.2	50.1
Age 25-44	41.3	42.3	50.4	54.3	49.4	54.3
Age 45-64	33.6	39.2	42.5	45.2	44.6	45.4
Technical, sales, and administrative support:						
Total, age 25 and older	61.6	63.2	61.5	64.9	62.6	69.2
Age 25-44	62.5	64.9	61.4	66.6	62.2	70.7
Age 45-64	61.2	61.6	62.0	62.9	63.7	67.7
Service occupations:						
Total, age 25 and older	58.9	67.5	58.9	67.3	58.4	70.9
Age 25-44	58.5	67.8	57.8	67.0	57.0	69.3
Age 45-64	60.5	68.4	61.6	68.2	61.1	73.5
Farming, forestry, and fishing occupations:						
Total, age 25 and older	16.7	12.3	18.3	14.4	16.9	18.7
Age 25-44	18.6	13.3	19.7	15.6	16.3	16.7
Age 45-64	16.0	12.6	17.5	14.6	19.9	22.8
Precision production, craft, and repair occupations:						
Total, age 25 and older	7.7	7.2	8.8	9.4	9.7	9.6
Age 25-44	7.6	7.0	8.5	9.5	8.4	9.2
Age 45-64	7.6	7.4	9.2	9.3	12.3	10.6
Operators, fabricators, and laborers:						
Total, age 25 and older	27.5	31.5	25.4	30.2	23.1	29.1
Age 25-44	26.0	30.8	23.9	29.5	21.2	29.5
Age 45-64	29.8	33.3	28.4	31.8	26.8	28.1

Source: 1980 and 1990 Census Public Use Micro Data file (PUMS) and 1994 March Current Population Survey (CPS) data file.

centage of women as full-time workers rose in a number of professional, managerial, and technical occupations between 1979 and 1986, including accountants and auditors, computer programmers, managers and administrators, computer systems analysts, and lawyers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1987). In 1979, 20 percent of full-time computer systems analysts were women, increasing to 30 percent by 1986; among lawyers, 10 percent were female in 1979, increasing to 15 percent in 1986.

Despite the growth in professional employment, women are more likely to be employed in service occupations than men, and these jobs tend to be lower paying occupations. In 1994, 71 percent of these nonmetro positions were held by women compared with 58 percent of metro positions. Women are also more likely than men to hold technical, sales, and administrative support positions. The distribution of women among the subcategories is very uneven; just 23 percent of engineering and science technicians were women, but 96 percent of secretaries, stenographers, and typists were women. Women residing in nonmetro areas are more likely to be in lower paying occupations than their metro counterparts. The higher paying professional and managerial occupations are concentrated in metro areas. Between 1980 and 1990, these positions increased at a faster rate in metro than in nonmetro areas; alternatively, the lowest paying support and sales occupations increased faster in nonmetro areas (Parker).

Men and women continue to do different jobs. Occupational sex segregation and the tendency of employers to pay the holders of predominantly "female" jobs less may reflect past and present job discrimination, as well as self-selection and social custom. The desire or need for women to work part-time contributes to sex segregation because occupations differ considerably in the opportunities they afford for part-time work. Barbara Bergmann documented the pervasive nature of segregation by job title and found that the average wage within a job title is negatively affected by the proportion of females in that job. Skills traditionally exercised by women are valued less in wage determination (England and Browne). Countering the conditions that depress women's status and earnings, occupational sex segregation declined between 1970 and 1980, and continued declining through the 1980's (Jacobs). Some of the conditions and preferences that have resulted in occupational segregation are presumably changing as more women view labor force participation as a lifelong activity (Bianchi). Younger women and better educated women have made significant gains in the integration of occupations (Fuchs).

Earnings

The gender gap in earnings has narrowed since 1980, as women's real wages have steadily increased relative to those of men (Smith and Ward), while men's real wages have declined (fig. 5). The gender gap in wages has declined, on average, by about 1 percent per year since 1976 (O'Neill and Polacheck). About one-third to one-half of the narrowing of the wage gap is explained by convergence in measurable work-related characteristics, such as schooling and work experience. Women's wages have risen in response to their expanded skills (Smith and Ward). The remainder is due to a relative increase in women's returns to experience as well as to declining wages in blue-collar work and other factors. The narrowing of the gender wage gap of the 1980's is expected to continue in the 1990's.

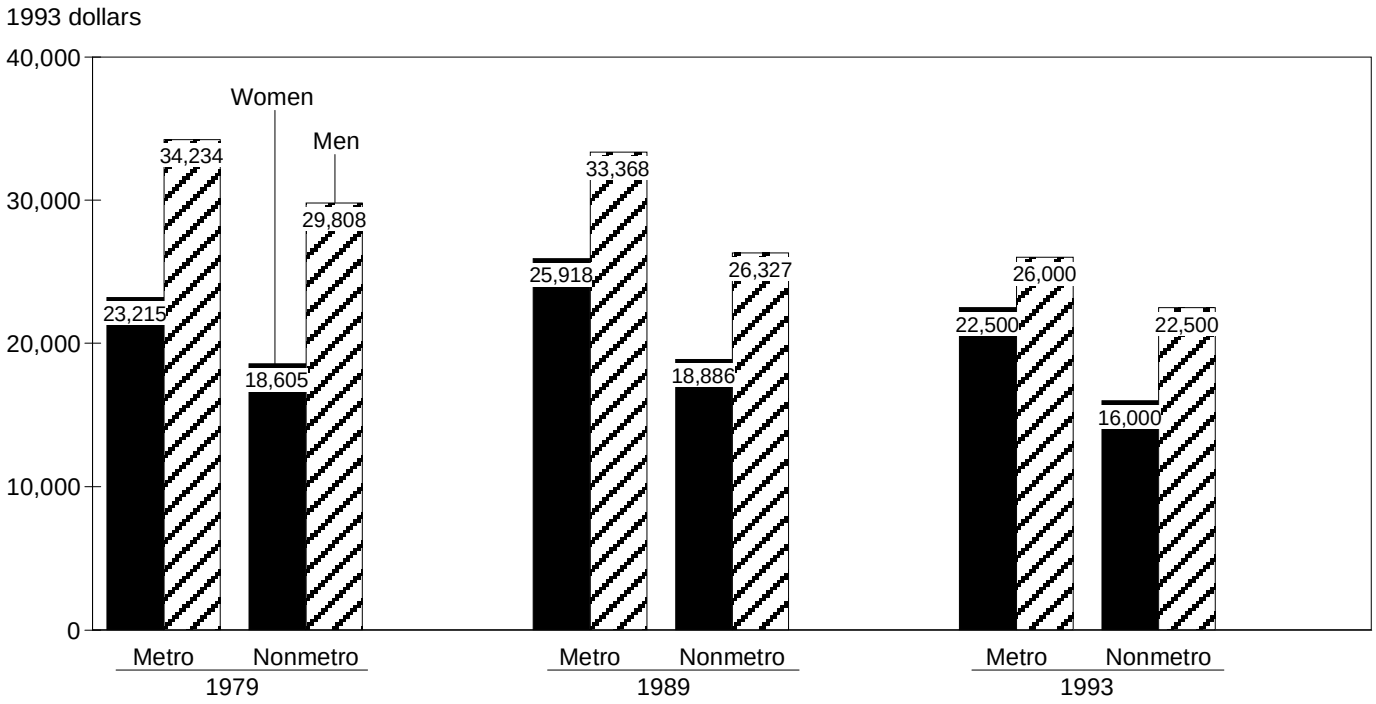
By 1993, nonmetro women's earnings, as measured by average earnings of full-time, year-round workers, were 69 percent of men's, up from 58 percent of men's in 1979 (table 6). Metro women's earnings also increased relative to men's, climbing from 57 percent to 73 percent of men's in 1993. The greater increase in metro women's earnings relative to men may reflect the faster growth in higher paying professional positions in metro areas since 1980.

In 1993, nonmetro women earned an average of $8.78 per hour compared with $11.25 per hour for metro women. This represents an absolute improvement for metro women from an hourly wage of $10.25 in 1979 (in 1993 dollars), but no improvement for nonmetro women (average hourly earnings of $8.88 in 1979). Because men's real hourly earnings declined over the decade, women improved their standing relative to men during the 1980's, with a slightly greater improvement among metro women. As measured by average hourly earnings, women earned roughly 68 percent of men's hourly wages in 1979, but by 1993, nonmetro women were earning 77 percent of nonmetro men's hourly wages while metro women were earning 80 percent of men's wages.

Because of their greater educational attainment and continuous labor force attachment, younger women advanced more, compared with men in the same age

Figure 5

Annual earnings of full-time, full-year female and male workers age 25-34 by residence



Source: 1980 and 1990 Public Use Micro Data file (PUMS) and 1994 March Current Population Survey (CPS) data file.

Table 6—Annual earnings by age and residence, 1979, 1989, and 1993

Item	1979		1989		1993	
	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro
	1993 dollars					
Total, age 25 and older:						
Women	21,304	16,858	23,883	17,475	24,000	18,000
Men	37,060	29,270	36,348	27,960	33,000	26,000
Ratio women/men (x100)	57	58	66	63	73	69
Age 25-44:						
Women	21,460	17,170	24,465	17,475	24,000	18,000
Men	35,500	29,260	34,950	27,301	30,000	25,000
Ratio women/men (x100)	60	59	70	64	80	72
Age 45-64:						
Women	21,050	16,760	23,300	17,475	24,000	18,000
Men	39,010	31,210	41,338	30,756	38,500	29,000
Ratio women/men (x100)	54	54	56	57	62	62

Source: 1980 and 1990 Census Public Use Micro Data file (PUMS) and 1994 March Current Population Survey (CPS) data file.

group, than their older counterparts. The movement into midcareer of a group of women with educational credentials and work experience much more similar to men's was a major factor affecting the male-to-female earnings ratio during the 1980's (Bianchi). Against a background of general wage decline, the pattern of gender differences in earnings of full-time, year-round workers is similar by residence, with metro women age 25-34 progressing more in closing the gender gap in earnings from 1979 to 1993 (fig. 5). The 1989-93

decline in earnings may be due partly to the July 1990-January 1991 recession, which would have had a greater effect on younger, less experienced workers.

During the 1980's, the relative wages and earnings of highly educated workers increased significantly, while the average level of real wage rates stagnated (Bound and Johnson). College-educated women made greater advances in earnings relative to men than their high school counterparts. Regardless of residence, female college graduates had earnings roughly 73 percent of men's in 1993, up 13 percentage points from 1979. The earnings of nonmetro women who had graduated from high school were 63 percent of men's in 1993, up from 55 percent in 1979 (table 7). Metro women who were high school graduates improved their standing more than nonmetro women; their earnings were 57 percent of men's in 1979, increasing to 73 percent in 1993.

Gains in earnings for women with a high school education or less resulted primarily from the deterioration in the real earnings of men rather than from any increase in the wages of women. The decline in blue-collar wages during the 1980's narrowed the gender gap, as a much larger proportion of men than women are employed as blue-collar workers. This disproportionately reduced male wages. Perhaps more nonmetro women are in the labor force because these women are more likely to need a second income. College-educated women's gains in earnings are due to both an increase in their wages and a decline in men's wages. Among young, college-educated workers, the average earnings of men and women increased but the percentage increases for women were over three times as large as for men (Bianchi).

The closing of the gender wage gap during the 1980's contrasts with earlier periods. Until the 1980s, women's earnings remained at approximately 60 percent of men's earnings (O'Neill and Polacheck). In view of the expanding women's movement, the passage of major antidiscrimination legislation, and the significant rise in women's labor force participation during the 1960's and 1970's, the apparent failure of the gender gap to narrow was puzzling. Part of this failure to narrow the gender gap may be understood in terms of gender differences in Vietnam War-era college attainment. College degrees for male veterans on the G.I. Bill created an unprecedented peak in the college graduate rate for men in the 1970's. Women could not compete. In metro areas, the college graduation rate of women rose to meet that of men by the late 1980's, and in nonmetro areas, the college rate of men fell to meet that of women (Swanson and McGranahan).

Many nonmetro workers hold low-paying jobs in which workers' weekly earnings are so low that year-round employment is insufficient to bring a family of four above the poverty line. These low-paying jobs are tied in with the greater share of service occupations in nonmetro areas. In 1993, 43 percent of nonmetro workers held low-paying jobs, substantially higher than the corresponding metro share of 32 percent (Swaim). The share of nonmetro workers in low-paying jobs rose by 9 percentage points between 1979 and 1993. Women are more likely than men to hold low-paying jobs. In 1993, 57 percent of nonmetro women

Table 7—Annual earnings by education and residence, 1979, 1989, and 1993

Item	1979		1989		1993	
	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro
	1993 dollars					
High school graduates:						
Age 25 and older—						
Women	19,861	16,682	20,970	16,310	20,000	15,704
Men	35,110	30,235	31,455	26,795	27,307	25,000
Ratio women/men (x100)	57	55	67	61	73	63
College graduates and higher:						
Age 25 and older—						
Women	28,519	23,410	33,785	26,795	34,000	27,350
Men	47,668	38,444	50,095	39,144	46,800	37,000
Ratio women/men (x100)	60	61	67	68	73	74

Source: 1980 and 1990 Census Public Use Micro Data file (PUMS) and 1994 March Current Population Survey (CPS) data file.

held low-paying jobs compared with 30 percent of nonmetro men, which represented a 3-percent increase since 1979 for women and an 11-percent increase for men.

Poverty

High poverty rates among nonmetro women signal a reason for public policy concern. Nonmetro women are more likely to be poor than either metro women or nonmetro men. The 1993 poverty rate for nonmetro women was 19.3 percent compared with 16.2 percent for metro women and 15.0 percent for nonmetro men (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). Women's poverty rates were higher than men's at every age in 1993. Among those over 65 years old, women's rates were twice as high as men's; the 1993 poverty rate was 20.3 percent for nonmetro women compared with 10.1 percent for nonmetro men. Elderly women in nonmetro areas are also more likely to be poor (20.3 percent in 1993) than their metro counterparts (13.5 percent). Rural elderly women living alone are particularly at risk economically; rural elderly women living alone had 69 percent as much income ($8,209) as urban elderly women living alone ($11,869) (Schwenk).

Alongside women's labor market advances is the worsening economic plight of many women. Gender disparities in poverty reflect the fact that women continue to work and earn less than men when they do work for pay. Women are more likely to be caring for their children, and a higher percentage of mother-only families with children under age 18 are poor. Marriage and childbearing affect women's risk of poverty in different ways. Whereas marriage and work reduce the risk, motherhood appears to increase it (McLanahan, Casper, and Sorensen). Many women still leave the labor market during pregnancy, at childbirth, or when their children are young, which affects their subsequent earnings. Even when mothers stay in the labor force, responsibility for children frequently constrains their choices of job and often results in their making sacrifices in their labor force activity.

The relative decline in traditional married-couple families has increased the share of females at risk of poverty. The increasing feminization of poverty, a shift toward more mother-child families among the poor, is a reflection of the growing instability of the traditional American family (Smith and Ward). In 1993, 43 percent of nonmetro mother-only families were poor, up from 37 percent in 1979; comparable figures for metro mother-only families show 38 percent were poor in 1993, up from 34 percent in 1979 (table 8). An even higher percentage of mother-only families with children under age 18 were poor during the same period: 57 percent of such families in nonmetro areas and 53 percent in metro areas in 1993, up roughly 6 percentage points since 1979. Among all families in 1993, 16 percent of nonmetro and 13 percent of metro families were poor.

While the nonmetro poverty rates for mother-only families were higher than those for comparable metro families, mother-only families were a smaller share of all nonmetro poor families (table 8). In 1993, 40 percent of nonmetro poor families were mother-only families compared with 52 percent of metro poor families

Table 8—Poverty by family structure and residence, 1979, 1989, and 1993

Item	1979		1989		1993	
	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro	Metro	Nonmetro
			Percent			
Percent poor:						
Families	9.2	12.0	10.8	14.0	13.2	16.0
Married-couple families	4.8	9.0	5.8	9.7	7.2	10.5
Mother-only families	34.0	36.9	34.5	41.7	37.8	42.6
With related children under age 18	47.9	50.5	50.3	54.6	52.9	56.9
Share of poor families:						
Married-couple families	44.3	66.1	42.7	58.2	42.8	56.9
Mother-only families	55.7	33.9	52.5	38.1	51.9	39.6

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Income, Poverty, and Valuation of Noncash Benefits: 1993," *Current Population Reports*, Series P-60, No. 188, 1995; "Poverty in the United States: 1988 and 1989," P-60, No. 171, 1991, and "Characteristics of the Population Below the Poverty Level: 1979," P-60, No. 130, 1981.

that were mother-only families. Two factors are operating in nonmetro areas: (1) an increase in the poverty rate of mother-only families, especially those with children under age 18, and (2) an increase in the share of poor families that are mother-only families. These two factors reflect changes in family structure as well: the proportion of families headed by women has increased in nonmetro areas.

More father involvement in the care and support of children would help alleviate poverty among women. Women who are not living with a husband are much more likely than men who are not living with a wife to be caring for and supporting dependent children (Bianchi). Continued movement toward gender equality in the labor force activity of men and women is another way to reduce gender differences in poverty. Funding for transportation and child care could help establish more of these services in rural areas that have higher poverty rates. Because nonmetro workers tend to have less education than their metro counterparts and comprise a larger share of the working poor, education and job training may help some rural parents with fewer skills and less training and education escape poverty.

Conclusions

A review of social and economic trends has demonstrated that between 1980 and the mid-1990's, the earnings of women and men became more equal. Before 1980, there had been no evidence that women were catching up with men in terms of pay. Changes in marriage and childbearing, educational attainment, labor force attachment, and occupational placement all contributed to narrowing the gender earnings gap. As these trends continue, gender differences in wages in the 1990's should narrow more than in the 1970's. In addition, declining discrimination toward women in the labor market, as a direct result of government activities and changing societal attitudes, will contribute to higher earnings for women. While affirmative action helps, the upgrading of women's relative position in the labor force over time has been, and continues to be, a gradual process.

While gender equity has substantially improved in the United States, nonmetro women have not consistently improved their standing relative to men when compared with women in metro areas. Nonmetro women are at an educational and occupational disadvantage. Additionally, nonmetro women are less likely than metro women to be in the labor force and more likely to be in lower paying occupations than their metro counterparts. The lower paying occupations in nonmetro areas contribute to college-educated women's movement out of such areas, influenced by the wider range of employment opportunities in metro areas.

Women's poverty rates are higher in nonmetro than metro areas. A higher percentage of nonmetro mother-only families are poor than metro mother-only families. An even higher percentage of mother-only families with children under age 18 are poor. Elderly women in nonmetro areas are also more likely to be poor than their metro counterparts; rural elderly women living alone are particularly at risk economically. These circumstances will continue to signal a need for public policy concern.